ISLAMIC CREED – RELEVANCE, SOURCES, AND CHRONOLOGY

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ABSTRACT:

Scholars of Islam have given high importance to the matter of Aqeedah and the acquisition of correct belief in the light of the book of Allah and the sunnah of His noble messenger and our master, Muhammad صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم. Learning the correct Aqeedah is even considered more important than learning any other aspects of religion in line with opinions of the Sahabah and the salaf. It is important to note, however, that though the concepts and underpinning objective related to Aqeedah existed from the time of companions and Tabi'oon, this term per se did not exist at that time. In the subsequent generations, a number of books were written on the subject which were categorized under various titles such as as-sunnah, al-tauheed, al-itiqad and others. In this article, the reasons that led to the writing of these esteemed books are discussed. We have also compiled a comprehensive, though not all encompassing, list of classical works on Aqeedah which can be very useful for the future researchers exploring this subject as well as the students of sacred knowledge who can utilize it in referring to these classical works and gaining comparative understanding of how the great Imams from the salaf understood the matter of Aqeedah, what challenges they faced in their times and what was their approach to counter that.

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WHAT IS AQEEDAH?

Sheikh Saleh Al-Munajjid explain that:

"*Aqeedah* refers to those matters which are believed, **with certainty and conviction**, in one's heart and soul. They are not tainted with any doubt or uncertainty"(al-Munajjid, 2013).

Therefore, Aqeedah are the matters of belief (which are known through Quran and Sunnah) that a Muslim must believe in the *hearts* without having any doubts (Sheikh Abu Zaid Zameer, 2009).

It is important to note, however, that heart is not where the Aqeedah ends, it is from where it starts (Ustadh Tim Humble, 2013). This means that it starts from the heart and has to go on to transform one's actions in accordance with one's beliefs. Sheikh Saleh Al-Munajjid explain scholars of Islam unanimously agree that the Iman and action go hand in hand. Iman consists of affirming the belief in the heart, declaring it by the tongue and demonstrating it by the actions (Al-Munajjid, 2004). In support of his claim about the unanimous agreement of the scholars and jurists about this, Sheikh Saleh Al-Munajjid has quoted a number of statements from the scholars which emphasize this aspect.

ROOTS OF THE WORD 'AQEEDAH':

The roots of the word '*Aqeedah*' are 'Aqad (عقد)' (Sheikh Abu Zaid Zameer, 2009). This word has many similar meanings. It is generally used in terms of tying something. Its other meanings include 'to affirm', 'to be certain, 'to take oath' and 'to confirm'. The specific term 'Aqeedah' is used with regards to the matters of religion. The use of this word about a situation in which a person has certainty and affirmation in a *worldly matter* will not be considered as 'Aqeedah' in the Shariah terms.

The Shariah is divided into two parts; Beliefs and Actions.

Beliefs (*Aqaid* – plural of '*Aqeedah*') are issues, which are not related to how an act is performed, like belief in the *Rububiyah* (Lordship) of Allah, the obligation to worship Him (alone), and the belief in the rest of the aforementioned pillars of *Iman*. These are called *Asliyah* - the basic foundation.

Actions are issues related to how actions are performed like *Salaat* (prayer), *Zakat* (charity) and *Sawm* (fasting) and other rulings with regards to actions. These are termed as *Far'eyyah* - the branches because their soundness or corruption is based upon the beliefs.

Thus, the Correct *Aqeedah* (belief) is the foundation upon which the religion is based and with it, the actions are set aright" (QSEP, 2005).

With regards to conviction in heart about a religious matter, an Aqeedah can be correct or incorrect. Accordingly, in simple terms, the correct Aqeedah is only that which is from Quran and Saheeh Ahadith which are the absolute truth. The reason for the incorrect Aqeedah is *Juhl* (ignorance) and a lack of authentic religious knowledge. To counter that, we accordingly need to obtain what is missing i.e. the correct Islamic knowledge. This paper is a humble attempt to make our little contribution to this cause.

SOURCES FOR AQEEDAH:

Aqeedah is *Tawqeefiyah*[1] - this means that the beliefs or the Aqeedah cannot be driven from anything except the *Shariah* proofs (Quran and Authentic *hadith*). There is no room for opinion and speculation in this regard. Why should we take Aqeedah only from Quran and Sunnah? Because no one is more knowledgeable about Allah and realities of everything more than Allah Himself. And after Allah, it is the messenger

[1] 'Tawqeefiyah' means that there is no room for opinion in it. No legislation or firm belief in this regard can come from any other source apart from the book of Allah and what is conveyed to us from His beloved messenger through authentic narrations. Whatever does not come from the Quran and Sunnah, cannot constituent Aqeedah and has to be rejected as an innovation.

of Allah ﷺ who knows the most about Him. These two sources have to be interpreted in a way that they were understood by the companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It is not a thing which can be determined by Ijtihad (Sheikh Abu Zaid Zameer, 2013) or anyone’s opinion, considered or otherwise.(Sheikh Dr. Abdur-Rahman Dimashqiah, 2010)
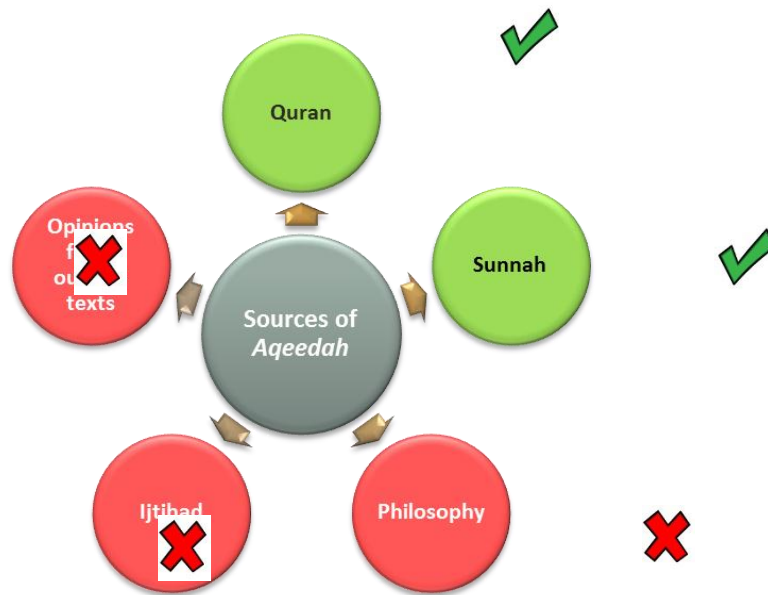
Figure 1: Sources for Aqeedah

Explanation for above mentioned points about sources for *Aqeedah* and their interpretation according to the way of companions, can be obtained from the following explanations by Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2002):

The first and the foremost thing which establishes who belong to Ahlus Sunnah Wal- Jama'ah and who do not is the methodology which is deployed to acquire the knowledge of the deen and the sources from which they get their beliefs, fiqh, and manners. The Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama’ah’s source is the book of Allah and the Sunnah of His messenger ﷺ. No one’s words and opinions can take precedence over the words and guidance from Allah and His messenger ﷺ. Accordingly, the book and

the Sunnah are the first point of reference for Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah for all their matters.

Accordingly to Ahl us-Sunnah, everyone can make errors in the matter of deen and otherwise except the most noble of men who was instructed by God Himself – Rasool Allah. Even the great scholars, mohaditheen, Imams and fuqaha are not free of errors being humans. Their opinions, accordingly, cannot be considered as absolute authority and can be accepted or rejected depending on their alignment with the book and the Sunnah. This principle has been consistently instructed by the noble Imams of our Ummah to accept their words if they are in alignment with sunnah and reject if they are not (Sh. Abdullah Hasan, 2012). It is only the messenger of Allah ﷺ whose words Ahlus Sunnah accept with full conviction and without any doubt.

The Ahl us-Sunnah cling to the Sunnah of the beloved messenger Muhammad ﷺ and the way of his noble companions (i.e. the Jama'ah). They follow what they did and follow those who followed them2.

Ahlus Sunnah attach themselves to the interpretations and understandings of Salaf us Saliheen3. They also take the interpretations of those who follow the pious predecessors. Their jama'ah is what they cling to in terms of principles and foundations. The reason for this is the fact the first Muslims (i.e. the Sahabah) learnt the matters of faith from the beloved messenger ﷺ and then taught it to the tabiuoon. In doing so they never preferred their own opinions, intellect or interpretations over those from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The salaf followed this methodology and communicated to us the pure belief.

[2] The virtue of Sahabah and those who follow them is evident from this hadith: "The best of my Ummah is my generation (Qarni), then those who follow them, then those who follow them." [Bukhari and Muslim]

[3] In line with hadith quoted in previous note, scholars have pointed out that the 'salaf' or the pious predecessors are the first three generations of Muslims. It also aligns with definition of the word 'qarni' in above hadith which can mean upto 100 years. According to this definition, the noble predecessors in the first 300 years from the time of prophet ﷺ can be considered to be the salaf.

The Ahlus Sunnah attach themselves to the Jama'ah of Rasool Allah and turn away from the places of separation and difference. They hold firmly to the rope on Allah, His book, the Sunnah and the Ijmaa (unanimous agreement of the companions). They refrain from diving into the realms of obscurity and un-clarity which separate and divide the united. This is because the Jama'ah in their estimation is the means of deliverance in this life and the hereafter.

Importance of Studying Aqeedah:

All the prophets came to teach us about the correct Aqeedah of tauheed and to connect the humanity to their Lord. Aqeedah is the basis of religion and this is what we understand from the shahadah – There is no God but Allah, He does not have any partner and Muhammad ﷺ is his messenger. A person who believes in this testimony becomes a Muslim. If we do not understand this very statement, it leaves very little doubt that either our faith is very weak or it is not there at all. Accordingly, it is important to study this, acquire knowledge about this and the other matters of creed that stem from it. It is also important to understand what weakens our belief, and destroys it, so that we can continue to stay on the right path and follow the correct creed and belief (al-Fawzaan, 2015).

It is also important to understand that acceptance of good deeds is linked to the correct Aqeedah as it is mentioned in the glorious Quran:

وَلَقَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَئِنْ أَشْرَكْتَ لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ

And it was already revealed to you and to those before you that if you should associate [anything] with Allah, your work would surely become worthless, and you would surely be among the losers.(Az-Zumar, 65)

In line with above, it is narrated from Imam Abu Hanifah that he said that understanding of the matters of belief comes before the understanding of shariah (Al-Qari, 2013). Sheikh ul Islam Al-Haruwi Al-Ansari emphasized the same point in his book Itiqad Ahlus Sunnah that the first obligation on a believer is to learn about Allah and the matters of belief. Once people acquire the belief, they can then be informed about matters of shariah such

as prayers etc[4]. Imam Ibn Taymiyyah explain in his book Aqeedah Al-Wastiyyah that what distinguishes the true Ahlus Sunnah Wal-Jama'ah from others is their belief and this is what makes them Al-Firqah An-Najiyyah Al-Mansoorah (the saved sect)[5].

It becomes clear from this that if we have deviation in our belief, our deeds will not be accepted. Accordingly, it is extremely vital, then, to understand what correct Aqeedah is, so that we can cling on to it and prevent ourselves from falling into the deviations. Scholars of Islam have always emphasized the importance of Aqeedah (al-Fawzaan, 2015) and communicated to us its pure form through their esteemed writings.

Historical Overview of Teaching and Learning of Aqeedah:

Glassé and Huston (2003) explained that in order to refute the heresies, deviations and incorrect point of views, scholars of Islam presented systematic statements to differentiate right from wrong in a clear manner in the light of Quran and Sunnah. These systematic statements were known by various names such as Al-Tawheed, As-Sunnah, Al-Shariah, AL-Itiqad and others (Al-Qari, 2013). In the present age as well, these statements illuminate for us the correct creed and highlight the deviations that can lead us astray.

Following is a brief account on how the matter of creed and Aqeedah was transmitted through the earlier generations of Muslims.

Sahabah:

[4] It is in accordance with the saying of Jundub ibn Abdullah R.A. in which he is reported to have said: "We were with the Prophet ﷺ while we were young boys, and we learned Iman before we learned the Quran. And then we learned the Quran and it increased us in Iman." (Reported by Ibn Majah and authenticated by Al-Albani – May Allah be pleased with them)

[5] It is narrated from the prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the Sunan Al-Tirmidhi that he said: "The Jews split up into seventy-one sects, the Christians split up into seventy-two sects, and this ummah (Muslims) will split up into seventy-three sects; all of them are in the Fire except one." Someone asked: "which is that one O Messenger of Allah?". He replied: "Whoever is upon that which I am upon and my companions". The hadith has been categorized by scholars as *Hasan*.

Sahabah R.A. learnt their religion directly from Rasool Allah ﷺ. Quran was revealed in front of their eyes. Allah provided them with a number of opportunities to acquire the correct faith. We know how angel Gabriel came and taught them the matters of faith through a conversation with Rasool Allah. Whenever they needed guidance about anything, they could go directly to the Messenger of Allah and take it. Accordingly, they were perfect in their faith and were free from all forms of doubts and confusion in the matter of Aqeedah. There Aqeedah was purely from the Quran and the sunnah. Accordingly, there was no need for any other book except the Quran and collection of the noble words of the messenger of Allah[6](al-Fawzaan, 2015).

It is also important to note that as the Prophet ﷺ himself explained the words of the Quran and their meaning to his companions, this gave them a great advantage over all those who came after them with regard to the interpretation of the Quran and the *Sunnah*. No one could know the meaning of the Quran and *Sunnah* better than they did. So whenever a dispute arises about the meaning of a hadith or a verse from the Quran, then we have to go back to the understanding of companions regarding that. This will close the way to those who misinterpret Quran and the *Sunnah* without knowledge basing it on their false desires. (Sheikh Dr. Abdur-Rahman Dimashqiah, 2010)

Two of the prominent examples of incorrect interpretations which still exists in our times, and clearly go against the interpretations of companions, are the philosophies of *Khwarij* and *Rawafidh*, who commit all forms of atrocities due to their misguidance and utter ignorance while considering it to be guidance or knowledge, coupled with their materialistic, political and social agendas (May Allah guide us all and protect from misguidance).

Tabi'een:

[٦] Research suggests some early compilations of hadith being attributed to the companions such as Abdullah Ibn Amr'. (Albayrak, 2015)

The students of companions proceeded upon this *manhaj* and approach - the *Tabi'een* (the next generation after the Companions). Accordingly, this generation was also free from doubt (al-Fawzaan, 2015). Till this generation, the concept of 'Aqeedah' per se did not formally exist (Shaykh Akram Nadwi, 2013) and sources for all beliefs were the book of Allah and guidance of His Messenger ﷺ.

Later Generations and Rise of sects:

After the generation of Taibi'een, many people entered Islam who did not have the matters of Aqeedah firmly grounded in their hearts and they were accordingly prone to deviations[7]. Deviant philosophies and ways of thinking also started in infiltrate into the matters of belief. A number of deviant sects accordingly rose which did not take their belief from the Quran and Sunnah but claimed that they did. There were also some other sects that emerged based on their misinterpretation of the texts. Such misinterpretations were rooted in their deviation from the understanding that the companions and the tabi'een had about the Quran and Sunnah.

In such times, the great Imams of Islam, the salaf as-saliheen, took the responsibility to clearly lay out the important matters of creed in the light of Quran and sunnah so that such explanations could become a reference point for their as well as the future generations. The noble Imams accordingly wrote various books on Aqeedah and destroyed the deviant beliefs. It is this reason that we see mention of certain deviant sects in these classical texts with an explanation of where they had deviated from the straight path.

This is how Allah SWT gave us protection and sent people who reformed the ummah and guided them to the straight path. Those trustworthy carriers transmitted the religion to us as it was conveyed by the messenger of Allah and dissolved the misinterpretations and incorrect beliefs.

[٧] This is in accordance with a statement from Umar R.A., as mentioned in Ibn Taymiyah's Majmua Al-Fatawa (10/301), where he is reported as saying: "Soon the bonds of Islam will be loosened bit by bit, because people will enter into Islam but will be unaware of Jahiliyah (ignorant practices that Islam opposes)."

The early texts on Aqeedah were known from various names. One of the common names for such works was *Kutub As-Sunnah* (books of the *Sunnah*) (al-Fawzaan, 2015).

Following is an overview of some of the classical works on Aqeedah:

TABLE 1: Chronology of Classical Texts on Aqeedah

Note: This is not an all-inclusive list.

Book	Author	Era
Fiqh Al-Akbar	Imam Abu Hanfiah	d. 150 H
Itiqad Aimah Al-Hadith	Imam Sufyan Al-Thauri	d. 161 H
Kitabul Iman	Abu 'Ubayd al-Qaasim ibn Salaam	d. 224H
Kitabul Iman	Imam Ib Abee Shaybah	d.235H
Usool us –Sunnah, Ar-Radd 'al al-Jahmiyyah wa Al-Zanaadaqah	Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal	d.241H
Khalq Afaalul-Ibaad, Kitabul-Imaan, Kitab Al-Tawheed	Imam Bukhari	d. 256H
Aqeedah Ar-Raziyan	Imam Abu Zur'ah Al-Razi Imam Abu Hatem Al-Razi	d. 264 d. 273
As-Sunnah	Abu Bakr al-Athram	d.273H
Kitab us Sunnah	Imam Ibn Abu Dawud As-Sijistani	d.275H

Book	Author	Era
Al-Ikhtilaf fi Ladfh war-Rad 'ala Al-Jahmiyah	Imam Ibn Qutaybah	d.276H
Asl us-Sunnah	Imam Abu Hatim ar-Razi	d.277H
Ar-Rad 'ala Al-Jayhmiyyah	Imam ad-Daarimee	d.280H
As-Sunnah	Qadhi Ibn Abee 'Asim	d.287H
As-Sunnah	Hafidh Abdullah ibn Imam Ahmad	d.290H
As-Sunnah	Muhaddith AbuBakr al-Maroozee	d.292H
As-Sunnah	Al-Marwazi	d.292H
Sharh As-Sunnah	Imam Ibn Jarir at-Tabari	d.310H
Kitab Al-Tawheed Wa Ithbaat Sifat Al-Rabb	Imam Ibn Khuzaymah	d.311H
Aqeedah At-Tahaawiyyah	Imam Abu Jafar at-Tahawi	d.321H
Al-Maqaalatul-Islamiyeen, Ar-Risaalah ilaa Ahlth-Thaghr and Al-Ibaanah 'an Usoolid-Diyaanah	Imam Abul-Hasan al-Ashari	d.324H
Sharhus-Sunnah	Imam al-Barbahari	d.329H
Ta'weelaat Ahl is-Sunnah, Kitab ut-Tawheed	Abu Mansur al-Maturidi	d. 333H

Book	Author	Era
Kitab us-Sunnah	Qadhi Abu Ahmad al-Asaal	d.349H
Ash-Shareeah	Imam Abu Bakr al-Aajuri	d.360H
Itiqaad Aimatul-Hadeeth	Imam Abu Bakr al-Ismaeeli	d.371H
Kitab Al-Sifaat, Kitab Al-Nuzool	Imam ad-Daaraqutni	d.385H
Al-Ibanah 'an Sharee'atil Firqatin - Naajiyah and Sharhul-Ibanah 'an Usoolis-Sunnah wad-Diyanah	Imam Battah al-Akbari	d.387H
As-Sunnah	Imam Abu Bakr ibn Abi Asim	d.387H
Muqaddimah Al-Risalaah	Imam Abu Muhammad Abdullah Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani	d.389H
Kitab Al-Tawheed, Ar-Rad 'ala Al-Jahmiyyah	Imam Ibn Mandah	d.395H
al-Tamhid	Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī	d. 403H
al-Mujarrad	Ibn Furak	d. 406H
Sharh Usool Itiqaad Ahlus-Sunnah Wal Jama'ah	Imam al-Laalilkaa'ee	d.428H
Al-Wusul ila al-Marifah Al-Istiwa	Imam Abu 'Amr at-Talamanki al-Andalusi	d.429H

Book	Author	Era
Al-Itiqad	Abu Nuaym al-Ashbaanee	d.430H
Risalah fee Ithbatil-Istiwaa	Imam Abu Muhammad al-Juwayni	d.438H
Kitab Al-Irshad	Imam Abu Muhammad al-Juwayni	d.438H
Aqeedah Nizamiyyah	Imam Abu Muhammad al-Juwayni	d.438H
Aqidatus-Salaf Ashaabul-Hadeeth	Imam Abu Uthmaan as-Sabooni	d.449H
Al-I'tqad alaa Madhab As-Salaf Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah	Imam al-Bayhaaqi	d.457H
Kitab al-Iman	AL-QADI ABU YA'LA	d. 458H
Dhamul-Kalam	Shaykh ul-Islaam Abu Ismaeel al-Harawi	d.481H
Qawaid al-Aqaid	Imam Ghazali	d. 505H
Umdat al-Aqidah	Imam Abu Hafs Umar an-Nasafi	d. 537H
Bad' al-Amali	Ali bin Uthman al-Ushi Al-Maturidi	d. 569H
Lum'at ul-'Itiqad	Imam Ibn Qudhama	d. 620H
Tawali' al-Anwar	Abdallah ibn Omar al-Baidawi	d. 685H
Aqeedah Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah	Akmal ud Din Al-Babarti	d. 712 H
Al-Aqidah Al-Wasitiyah	Ibn Taymiyah	d.728H

Book	Author	Era
Al-Aqidah Al-Hamawiyah	Ibn Taymiyah	d.728H
Kitab Al-Iman	Ibn Taymiyah	d.728H
Al-Uloow	Shams ad-Din al-Dhahabi	d. 748H
Al-‘Aqidah Al-Sanusiyah	Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi	d.795H

Present State:

When we critically analyse the deviant sects of today’s age and their system of beliefs, it becomes evident that they have inherited a great deal from the deviant sects from the past (Qari Muhammad Tayyib Qasimi, 2005).

In present age, we not only see remains of some previous attempted distortions, but also new philosophies that have emerged with an aim to sow the seeds of doubt and confusion among the *Ummah*. Works on creed are accordingly of continued importance in the present age as they were in the past times in order to keep the Muslims steadfast on the very tenants of their faith. We also need to study the reasons which result in such misguidances, so that we can avoid them and keep our belief correct and pure. Referring back to the explanation of Aqeedah by the Imams of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama’ah, we will be better equipped to not only keep ourselves on the straight path but also answer and assist those who have gone astray due to the mis-interpretations and flawed understanding. That only is what can rescue us in this downpour for fitnahs and batil beliefs (Qari Muhammad Tayyib Qasimi, 2005).

Conclusion:

It is evident from the discussion in this paper and that the books of Aqeedah were compiled as a response to the heresies and deviations that

started to surface during the time of salaf and afterwards. The pious predecessors penned down the specific aspects of belief and faith that was essential for all Muslims to understand, affirm and acknowledge. They also segregated the deviant ideologies and concepts by warning the believers about their causes and why they considered them against the Quran and Sunnah. Interestingly, despite the fact that centuries have passed since these books were written, they relevance has not diminished and we still see a common trend between the deviations of that time and today's age. We still have the Khwarij, Rawafidh, Qadyanis, Reformists and other deviant groups and sects in our times. The reasons for their deviation are no different from what their ancestors in deviation had. Accordingly, it is more important for us than ever before, to dive deep into the learning of our beautiful religion and prepare ourselves against these fitnahs. Aqeedah, along with other core Islamic sciences such as Usul Al-Fiqh, Usul Al-Hadith and Usul Al-Tafsir, is unparalleled in importance in current times. The classical books on Aqeedah still serve as our lighthouse and take us to our destination by preventing the misguidance that keeps on chasing us in various shapes and forms. Comparative study of these texts and deep reflection on the present age and times can help us strengthen our faith and connect to the bigger picture.

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